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ABSTRACT

This study examines the changing patterns of usage of Scottish Gaelic and English in the northern Scottish counties of Sutherland and Caithness during the period 1698-1901. The study explores the way these patterns resulted from processes found in different social situations. It is concluded that although the shift from Gaelic to English was not felt with the same impact everywhere, it probably followed a number of stages: (1) an increased use of English words or idioms within Gaelic; (2) an associated decline in the purity of Gaelic used; (3) an increased interest in acquiring and using English; and (4) differential language use among generations, social classes, and domains of usage. It is suggested that while the decline of Gaelic may have been apparent through geographical retreat of the language border, it was more determined by the widespread substitution of English for Gaelic as the daily language. Twenty-eight references and a six-page bibliography are included. (MSE)

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THE DECLINE OF GAELIC IN NORTHERN SCOTLAND, 1698–1901

CHARLES W J WITHERS

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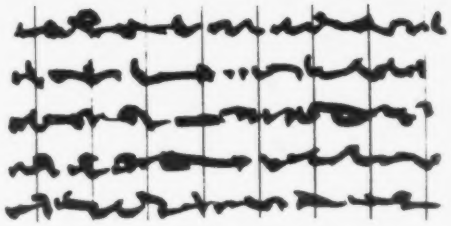

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A CASE STUDY IN HISTORICAL GEOLINGUISTICS :
THE DECLINE OF GAELIC IN NORTHERN SCOTLAND, 1698-1901

CHARLES W J WITHERS

The author is a lecturer in Geography,
The College of St Paul and St Mary, Cheltenham

DISCUSSION PAPERS IN GEOLINGUISTICS 7
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Introduction :

To be anything more than a descriptive narrative, the study of language change over space and time must consider and seek to explain not only geographical changes in the area over which a language is spoken or was spoken at some past period, but must examine also the social processes of language change. As one author has noted, the geographical study of language would be limited indeed if the distributions of language could not be explained in historical and sociological terms (E. Jones 1967, 22). Attempts at the explanation of geolinguistic change - 'the analysis of the distribution patterns and spatial structure of languages in contact ' (C.H. Williams 1980, 208) - must focus therefore upon the social processes of language usage and the way that such processes act to change the extent of a language area as much as upon geographical changes in that area itself. This is as true of the examination of language change at some past period - what may be called 'historical geolinguistics' as it is of geolinguistic change in the present.

This paper is a case study in historical geolinguistics. It focusses upon the geography of the Scottish Gaelic language in the north of Scotland, or more specifically the counties of Sutherland and Caithness, in the period 1698 to 1901. These dates respectively mark the first picture of the Gaidhealtachd or Gaelic-speaking area for Scotland as a whole (C.W.J. Withers 1980), and the last Census to present records by parish of the numbers speaking Gaelic. Through an examination of a range of sources, attention is paid to the changing patterns of Gaelic and English in northern Scotland and to the way in which such patterns, apparent at the level of the parish, were determined by a variety of processes and evident in a number of different social situations. The regional perspective here presented may not be typical of the shift from Gaelic to English throughout

Scotland at the same period, but the patterns and processes here examined must certainly be considered representative of the complex nature of language change within Gaelic Scotland in the past and the paper thus a useful addition to those studies that have examined the geography of Gaelic in Scotland (see accompanying references and bibliography).

Gaelic in Scotland :

In 1881 the Census first asked questions of the ability to speak Gaelic 'habitually'. This was the first governmental enumeration of the Gaelic language in Scotland. It is likely there was some under-enumeration stemming from confusion as to habitual use and the figure that some 231,594 persons (6.76 per cent of Scotland's total population) were reckoned Gaelic speakers in 1881 must be considered an under-estimate. From 1891, the Census distinguished between speakers of Gaelic only and those who spoke Gaelic and English. 6.84 per cent of Scotland's population spoke Gaelic in 1891 : a monolingual Gaelic population of 43,738 persons with another 210,677 persons speaking both Gaelic and English. By 1971 Gaelic was spoken by only 88,892 persons in Scotland and although numerically Gaelic was spoken by more persons in 1971 than in 1961 (the result of an increasing Gaelic learner population) this latter-day increase is in stark contrast to the overall decline of Gaelic apparent from the Census figures (Table 1).

Although important to an understanding of the changing geography of Gaelic, the Census provides only a part picture. The figures themselves mask important variations within the national picture and within counties in the way Gaelic was used and spoken - by age, by sex, and in the different spheres or domains of daily life. Moreover, the changing geographical pattern of Gaelic in Scotland is largely separated from the underlying processes of change operating upon the language

Table 1

GAELIC-SPEAKING POPULATION BY COUNTY, 1881-1971 [1]

	1881 [2]	1891 [3]	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971
SCOTLAND	6.76	6.84	5.57	4.56	3.47	2.97	1.98	1.64	1.78
Counties:									
Aberdeen	0.25	0.59	0.48	0.38	0.30	0.26	0.26	0.21	0.65
Angus	0.24	0.57	0.50	0.42	0.29	0.27	0.18	0.19	0.56
Argyll	65.25	60.88	54.35	47.06	34.56	33.17	21.69	17.20	13.72
Ayr	0.33	0.89	0.73	0.58	0.50	0.41	0.33	0.30	0.59
Banff	0.58	1.08	0.88	0.66	0.48	0.31	0.31	0.29	0.73
Berwick	0.09	0.29	0.26	0.34	0.24	0.26	0.24	0.21	0.57
Bute	22.70	20.34	15.71	12.02	4.57	5.17	2.28	1.64	1.90
Caithness	9.48	11.96	9.16	5.62	3.76	2.59	1.25	0.90	1.55
Clackmannan	0.04	0.82	0.57	0.77	0.51	0.48	0.28	0.31	0.57
Dumfries	0.02	0.29	0.26	0.33	0.23	0.28	0.22	0.17	0.51
Dunbarton	2.02	4.13	2.96	2.46	1.44	1.34	0.89	0.77	1.04
East Lothian	0.83	1.50	1.29	1.19	0.59	0.45	0.38	0.33	0.52
Fife	0.08	0.42	0.42	0.55	0.33	0.29	0.21	0.23	0.56
Inverness	75.99	73.24	64.85	59.07	50.91	43.97	30.57	25.91	22.02
Kincardine	0.05	0.35	0.27	0.30	0.29	0.30	0.25	0.32	0.70
Kinross	0.16	0.96	0.85	0.61	0.85	0.76	0.61	0.46	0.73
Kirkcudbright	0.03	0.19	0.27	0.33	0.28	0.28	0.29	0.26	0.54
Lanark	1.28	2.40	2.19	1.86	1.29	1.19	0.90	0.22	0.57
Midlothian	0.60	1.57	1.28	1.05	0.70	0.63	0.45	0.21	0.53
Moray	2.63	5.64	4.48	2.98	2.08	1.38	0.59	0.53	0.88
Nairn	20.32	27.07	15.29	10.54	6.47	5.19	1.69	1.79	1.64
Orkney	0.12	0.31	0.26	0.31	0.27	0.27	0.21	0.25	0.55
Peebles	0.02	0.57	0.51	0.69	0.38	0.44	0.36	0.39	0.91
Perth	12.10	11.95	9.94	7.70	5.25	4.21	1.90	1.53	1.68
Renfrew	2.15	3.17	2.30	1.90	1.31	1.12	0.67	0.59	0.81
Ross and Cromarty	76.57	76.92	71.76	64.01	60.20	57.29	46.05	41.31	35.12
Roxburgh	0.05	0.35	0.29	0.32	0.24	0.22	0.21	0.21	0.39
Selkirk	0.05	0.29	0.26	0.30	0.20	0.24	0.24	0.27	0.72
Shetland	0.04	0.25	0.21	0.17	0.44	0.15	0.11	0.10	0.42
Stirling	0.49	1.60	1.55	1.17	0.82	0.67	0.41	0.38	0.71
Sutherland	80.40	77.10	71.75	61.75	52.25	44.05	25.26	18.83	14.51
West Lothian	0.12	1.02	0.97	0.74	0.23	0.23	0.17	0.22	0.55
Wigtown	0.08	0.20	0.29	0.31	0.35	0.36	0.22	0.32	0.55

1: Percentages based on the population aged three and over.

2: The 1881 Census asked to what extent Gaelic was spoken "habitually".

3: The 1891 Census was the first to differentiate between "Gaelic-only" and "Gaelic-and-English" speakers.

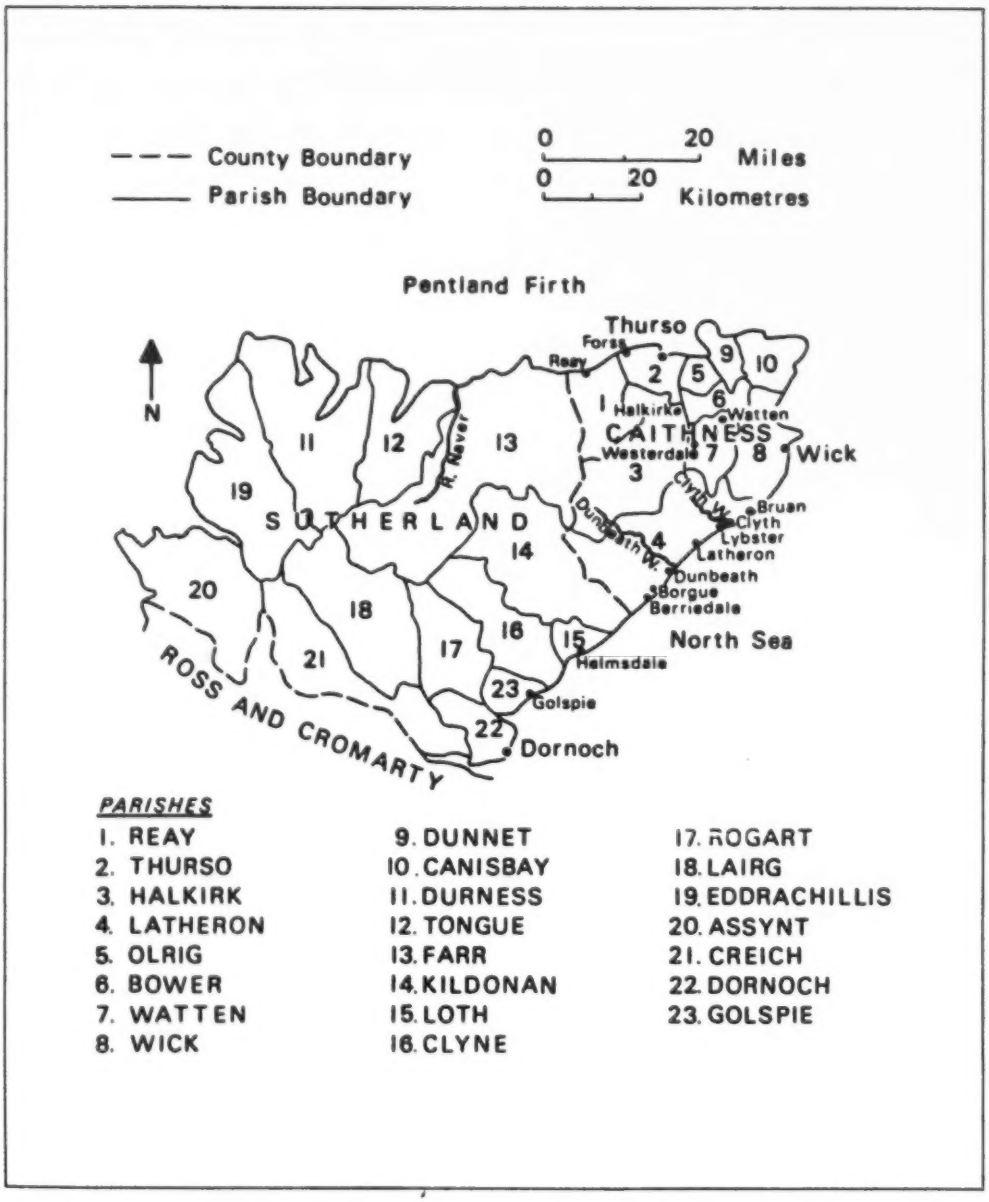
since 1881, and perhaps more importantly, from before the period of the Census records. Fortunately there exist a number of sources by which to understand not only the position of the Gaelic language in Scotland before 1881, but also to illuminate the complex social usages of language underlying this picture. Several of these sources are used to explore the relationships between spatial change and the social usage of Gaelic in the northern mainland counties of Sutherland and Caithness from the late seventeenth century to the early 1900s.

The position of Gaelic in Sutherland and Caithness 1698 to 1901 :

Sutherland and Caithness are the northern-most counties on the Scottish mainland and thus at the greatest distance from the Lowland centres of English-speaking and political authority. Indeed, until the end of the thirteenth century and perhaps as late as the 1600s in parts of Caithness, Norse influence in trade, economy, politics,and language was stronger than English or Scots. Even by the 1790s some contemporary observers reported how the Scots English used in parts of the north east was intermixed with a Norse accent and 'Norse vocables'. In Sutherland, however, the Gaelic language has long been predominant and the broad shift from Norse to Gaelic to Scots English in Caithness has been paralleled in Sutherland by the no-less complex shift from Gaelic to English. From the 1600s onwards, Sutherland and Caithness were increasingly integrated into the Scottish economy and to this extent the changing fortunes of Gaelic in northern Scotland have paralleled the increasing involvement of that region with the trade and society of the remainder of Scotland. Then, as now, most persons were dependent upon the land or the sea for their livelihood and even on the barren soils of the more isolated north and west of Sutherland, where population was dispersed and few in number, the land permitted

small patches of arable in combination with the chiefly pastoral way of life. In eastern Sutherland and Caithness, population tended to be scattered along the coasts in small communities dependent mainly upon fishing. It was in many of these small villages along the low-lying coastal fringes skirting the upland heart of Sutherland and western Caithness that Gaelic was to be last widely spoken as the inhabitants moved from glen to coast during the 1800s. Prior to that period, both the population and the language were more widely dispersed throughout the two counties.

In 1698 Gaelic was spoken by the majority of the population throughout Sutherland, but in Caithness Gaelic was widely known and used only in the parishes of Thurso, Reay, Halkirk, and Latheron (all parishes and places mentioned in the text may be located using Figure 1). It is likely that Gaelic was also spoken (though by how many and to what degree of everyday use we are unlikely ever to know) in the more easterly parishes of Caithness of this time. Although English (or more properly Scots English) had been understood and used in several of the towns and villages along the eastern coast since the 1400s and probably earlier, Gaelic was widely used in church services in several parishes including Dornoch and Creich by the 1560s (H. Scott ed. 1915-61, 7, 81-83), and in the Caithness village of Watten, records attest to the presence of nearly 100 Gaelic monoglots in the later 1650s who were protesting the arrival in their midst of a minister who spoke only English. A report of date 1706 noted that 'there are Seven parishes in Caithness where the Irish language is used. viz Thurso, Halkrig (Halkirk), Rhae (Reay), Lathrone (Latheron), Ffar (Farr), Week (Wick), Duirness (Durness). But the people of Week understand English also, (S.R.O., CH 1/2/30/4, f.384(1)). Even allowing for the fact that the author of the report misplaced the



PARISHES

1. REAY	9. DUNNET	17. ROGART
2. THURSO	10. CANISBAY	18. LAIRG
3. HALKIRK	11. DURNESS	19. EDDRACHILLIS
4. LATHERON	12. TONGUE	20. ASSYNT
5. OLRIG	13. FARR	21. CREICH
6. BOWER	14. KILDONAN	22. DORNOCH
7. WATTEN	15. LOTH	23. GOLSPIE
8. WICK	16. CLYNE	

Figure 1

Sutherland parishes of Durness and Farr in Caithness, this evidence and the presence of monolingual Gaels in the village and parish of Watten would suggest that Gaelic was known and spoken, if only by a few, in eastern Caithness in the later 1600s.

Further evidence of the early 1700s attests to the persistence of a linguistic divide, albeit not a well-defined one, within Caithness. The author of a geographical description of Canisbay parish in 1726 considered that the population of 'Lathron, Watten, Halkirk, Thurso, and Reay speak the Irish' (Gaelic) or rather that 'at least the greater part of the common people do and those parishes must have Irish ministers'. The inhabitants of Wick, Canisbay, Olrig, Bower, and Dunnet parishes were said to speak 'only in English'. One writer of this period noted of Caithness as a whole 'The people for the most part, speak both Irish and English', and added the interesting observation on the language 'boundary' in the county : 'But if ye suppose a Parallel to the Hypotenuse drawn from Week to Thurso, these on the Eastside of it speak most part English, and those on the Westside Irish; and the last have Ministers that preach to them in both languages' (A. Mitchell ed. 1906, I, 151; III, 83). Aeneas Bayne's Short Survey of the County of Caithness written in 1735 records 'that in five or six out of the ten parishes into which Caithness is divided, "English" was the mother tongue, and, though Gaelic was spoken in the other four, it existed side by side with the local Scots dialect' (J. Donaldson 1936, 13). Alexander MacBain's memorial on the Highlands, written sometime in the 1750s, reports of the language situation in Caithness in similar terms : 'Caithness contains Ten parishes, Five whereof speak English, after the Scottish dialect; and the other Five a corrupt kind of Irish tho' the English is daily gaining ground' (A. Lang ed. 1898, 8). In a list of about 1765-1769

of those parishes throughout Scotland in which Gaelic was either generally spoken or preached (C.W.J.Withers 1981), the Caithness parishes of Thurso, Reay, Halkirk and Latheron were reckoned Gaelic speaking whilst all of Sutherland was considered Gaelic. The figures that about 20,774 persons in Sutherland and 11,975 persons in Caithness (an estimated 53.9 per cent of the county population in the mid-eighteenth century) spoke Gaelic at that period should be treated with some caution since the totals undoubtedly mask a range of abilities in both Gaelic and English within the 'Gaelic parishes' and in view of the time difference between the 1765-1769 list of Gaelic parishes and the 1755 population totals.

By the later 1700s, Gaelic was giving way to English in a number of places and in a variety of ways. Although Gaelic was still used in divine worship in Latheron, Halkirk, Reay, and Thurso by the 1790s the language was weakening in daily use in the face of the increased familiarity with, and use of, English. In Canisbay by 1793 Gaelic was said to be 'totally unknown', as it had probably been for some decades previously, and in Wick little or no Gaelic was spoken by 1794. In Reay, Gaelic was still predominant by 1793 but many of the population also spoke English. A report of 1797 upon Halkirk parish makes clear not just that 'of late years, the English is making great progress at the expense of the Earse' (Gaelic), but also illuminates the complex patterns of language usage within this general picture : 'Some speak only the Earse, but do not speak or understand the English; some understand the English, but do not speak it; some speak the English, but do not speak or understand the Earse; some understand the Earse, but do not speak it; but the greatest number speak and understand both these languages equally well' (O.S.A., XIX, 62). Throughout Sutherland at the same period, Gaelic was 'the principal language'

although English was of course known and used by some. Even allowing for the presence of some native English speakers and the ability of some chiefly Gaelic speakers to understand and speak English, Gaelic was considered 'in common use' throughout Sutherland in 1806 and in Caithness at the same date the Gaelic parishes were the same as those of half a century earlier - Reay, Thurso, Halkirk, and Latheron (Figure 2). This division within the language geography of the north of Scotland between the Gaelic area of Sutherland and the larger but more thinly populated parishes of Western Caithness on the one hand and the areas of English in eastern Caithness on the other is apparent in a report of 1822. Table 2 shows the estimated Gaelic speaking population for a number of parishes in the north at that date. The question asked in the report - which language was preferred - must be presumed to hide a number of variations in the preference for and use of Gaelic or English, but the broad distinction within the north of Scotland between Gaelic and English areas cannot be doubted.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Gaelic had declined still further. In Dunnet only English was spoken by 1840 whilst in Halkirk the Scotch language was said to prevail far more than 30 or 40 years earlier and such also was the case in Latheron, Reay, and Thurso. In Ascynt by the late 1830s, English was 'making slow but sure progress' - a situation common throughout Sutherland to varying degrees by that period. In the isolated parishes of Durness and Eddrachilis, Gaelic was still widely spoken and much preferred as the first language and had not lost much ground to English, but in Farr English had gained ground considerably by 1834, and in Golspie there was 'hardly an individual who does not understand and speak English' by that date. In Clyne one author reckoned that Gaelic had declined so markedly by 1840 that 'it bids fair to be altogether unknown at no very distant period' and of Dornoch

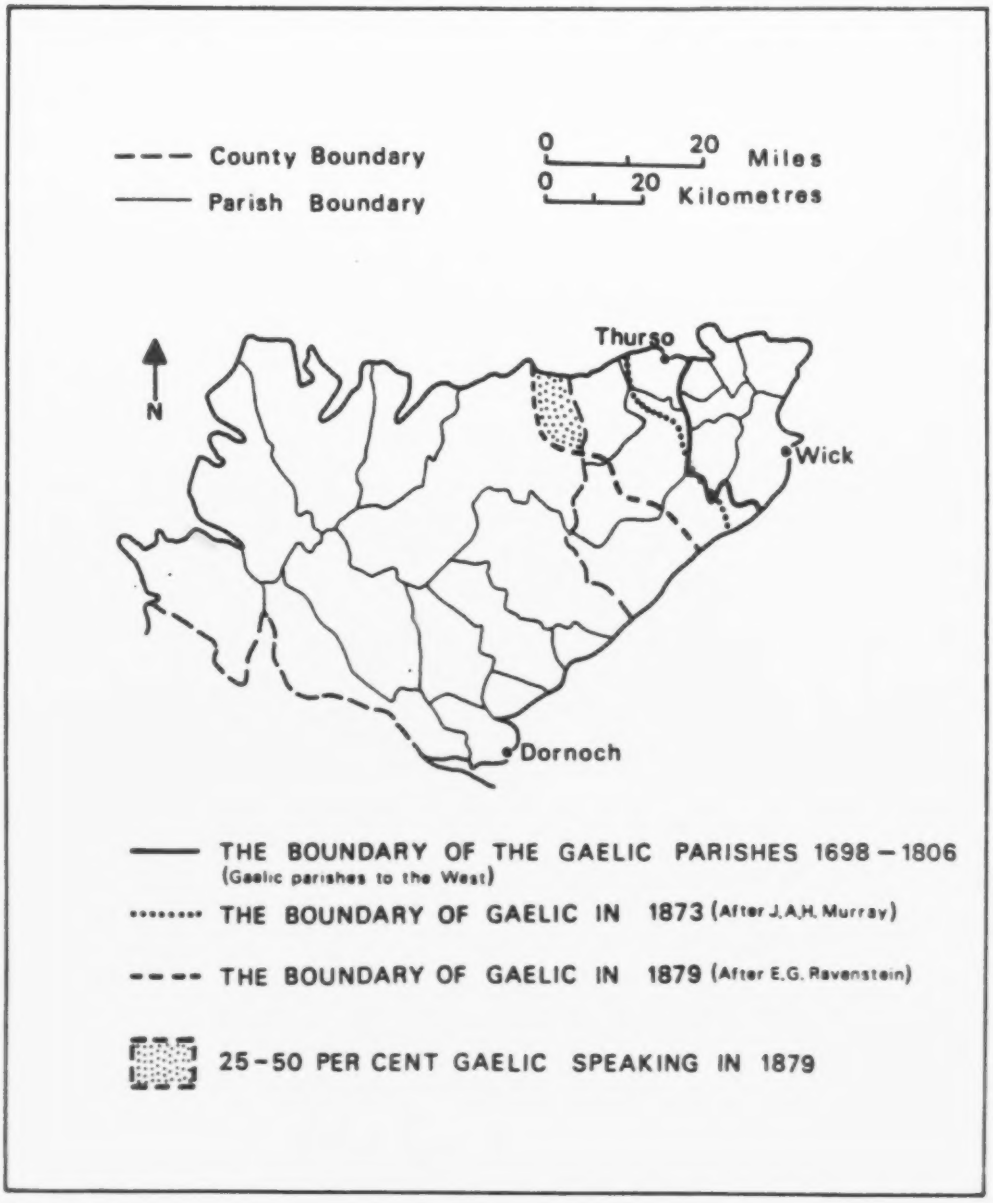

County Boundary
Parish Boundary
0 20 Miles
0 20 Kilometres
N
Thurso
Wick
Dornoch
THE BOUNDARY OF THE GAELIC PARISHES 1698 – 1806
(Gaelic parishes to the West)
THE BOUNDARY OF GAELIC IN 1873 (After J.A.H. Murray)
THE BOUNDARY OF GAELIC IN 1879 (After E.G. Ravenstein)
25–50 PER CENT GAELIC SPEAKING IN 1879

Figure 2

parish in 1834 Gaelic was so rapidly falling out of use that one observer considered it would be extinct there 'in the course of sixty or seventy years'. By the 1870s, Gaelic was still regularly preached in places such as Latheron, Lybster, Reay, and occasionally in Bruan in Caithness but such usage obscured the general spatial retreat and social decline of the language. The author of a report of 1840 upon Latheron parish noted how 'the English has not only made encroachments upon the Gaelic territory, but has extended itself over the whole neighbouring district'. Interestingly, he recorded also an observation on the linguistic divide within the north : 'It is a singular circumstance, that, for a long period, the burn of East Clyth, seems to have formed the boundary between the Gaelic and English languages. On the east side of it, scarcely a word of Gaelic was either spoken or understood, and on the west side, the English shared the same fate' (N.S.A., 15, 93). The belief that this burn was the language boundary has persisted into the twentieth century. At least one person with whom the present author has been in touch concerning the position of language in Sutherland and Caithness talks of Latheron parish as chiefly Gaelic until about 1870 with Clyth Water the boundary between languages within the parish. This modern-day memory is supported by further evidence of the 1870s and by recent work on language usage in East Sutherland (N. Dorian 1978).

The Gaelic-English boundary in 1873 ran from the mouth of Forss Water west of Thurso (Figure 1) past the village of Halkirk and thence to the east coast near Bruan (J.A.H. Murray 1873, 233). E.G. Ravenstein writing in 1879 considered the divide to begin on the county boundary and run direct to Lybster thereby including all those districts 'where Gaelic is spoken by a majority' (E.G. Ravenstein 1879, 593). Outside this area, Gaelic was spoken by between 25 and 50 per cent of the

Table 2

The number of persons 'speaking Gaelic best' in Sutherland and Caithness 1822[1]

	Population in 1822	Estimated Number of Gaelic Speakers	Gaelic speakers as a per cent of parish population
(a) Sutherland[2]			
Assynt	2509	2446	98.0
Creich	1160	1060	91.4
Dornoch	2083	2016	97.0
Durness	1005	967	96.2
Eddrachilis	934	927	99.0
Farr	1741	1595	92.0
Lairg	838	822	98.0
Rogart	1777	1744	98.0
Tongue	1807	1763	98.0
(b) Caithness[3]			
Halkirk	2418	1214	50.2
Reay	2537	1956	77.0
Watten	1182	121	10.2

1 : Moral Statistics of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (1826), 55-57.

2 : No information given for the parishes of Clyne, Golspie, Kildonan, Loth.

3 : No information given for the parishes of Bower, Canisbay, Dunnet, Latheron, Olrig, Thurso, Wick.

Table 3

Gaelic speakers as a percentage of the total parish population in Sutherland and Caithness c.1765 - 1901

		c.1765[1]	1806[2]	1881[3]	1891	1901
(a)	Sutherland					
	Assynt	100	100	93.3	86.9	84.0
	Clyne	100	100	73.9	69.8	69.0
	Creich	100	100	73.5	62.9	62.4
	Dornoch	100	100	65.7	70.4	56.5
	Durness	100	100	87.4	83.8	76.0
	Eddrachilis	100	100	81.5	84.9	80.4
	Farr	100	10[illegible]	85.1	80.1	81.3
	Golspie	100	100	47.6	49.1	43.5
	Kildonan	100	100	59.1	49.0	41.0
	Lairg	100	100	68.7	68.4	66.4
	Loth	100	100	36.5	50.9	41.0
	Rogart	100	100	86.6	75.9	74.0
	Tongue	100	100	92.8	85.1	83.3
(b)	Caithness					
	Bower	0	0	0.1	3.2	2.3
	Canisbay	0	0	0.1	0.8	0.8
	Dunnet	0	0	3.9	3.0	1.4
	Halkirk	100	100	9.4	19.8	15.5
	Latheron	100	100	29.1	35.4	26.3
	Olrig	0	0	2.5	4.0	3.5
	Reay	100	100	59.3	53.5	27.6
	Thurso	100	100	5.3	7.6	7.0
	Watten	0	0	11.9	8.5	5.8
	Wick	0	0	1.0	3.0	2.6

1 : From J. Walker (1808), 31-33 using population totals from J. Webster (1755) in J.G. Kyd (1952).

2 : From Selkirk (1806), Ivi-Iviii.

3 : Census of Scotland

inhabitants in a small pocket of north east Sutherland (Figure 2). The extent to which Gaelic was spoken within the 'Gaelic' area thus defined varied from district to district. In the interior and along the north and west coasts of Sutherland, Gaelic was by far the more widely used language even by the 1870s whilst along the east coast English was more common although Gaelic was still used in religious services in places. In Latheron, Gaelic was spoken by some 89 per cent of the population in 1879, in Halkirk and Reay by 39 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, and despite some under-enumeration in the 1881 Census the picture provided by Ravenstein and others for the pre-Census period is supported by that material and later Census evidence (Table 3).

Throughout Caithness, Gaelic was everywhere subordinate to English by 1901 - only in Latheron with a Gaelic speaking total of 1372 persons and in Reay with 269 Gaelic speakers was Gaelic spoken by more than one-quarter of the population by the beginning of the twentieth century (Table 3). Even allowing for the fact that English was known and used by some by 1765, 1806, and as early as 1698, there can be no doubting the dominance of Gaelic in Sutherland from 1698 to 1901 and the east (English) versus west (Gaelic) division within Caithness over that period. From 1681 to 1901 the Census records illuminate these earlier trends (Table 3). Yet these later figures also obscure a number of important features. Firstly, although several parishes had quite a large Gaelic population - Thurso having 372 persons and Halkirk 365 in 1901 - such people represented but a fraction of the total parish population. Secondly, the totals mask important distributional patterns within the parishes particularly with regard to urban-rural differences. Certainly from 1681, and probably for some period before, towns and villages tended to have quite important Gaelic speaking communities, at least in terms of actual numbers, but these totals represented only

a small percentage of the total population of that place. Moreover, the very concentration in one place of these Gaelic speakers meant that whilst they may have sought the company of fellow speakers or maintained Gaelic through the common pursuit of certain occupations (N. Dorian 1978), they were also more subject to outside influences and the English language and culture than those Gaelic speakers scattered thinly over the rural hinterland whose very isolation served to distance them from such changes. Thirdly, the distinction made in the Census from 1891 onwards between Gaelic-only speakers and speakers of Gaelic and English affords some insight into the decline of the monoglot Gaelic community (Table 4). If the evidence of the twenty years prior to 1901 (and particularly the period 1891-1901) is taken as a reliable guide, the shifts in the area over which Gaelic held sway in Sutherland and Caithness before 1881 were accompanied by a marked dropping-off in the 'core' of monolingual Gaelic speakers as well as a widespread decrease in the everyday use of Gaelic by those inhabitants of the north who also, and increasingly, spoke English. To this extent, the shifting geography of Gaelic was as much the result of changes in the 'intensity' of use of the language as it was the retreat of the Gaelic language boundary (Figure 2). The social patterns of use and reasons behind this changing geographical picture are examined below.

The processes of geolinguistic change :

As has elsewhere been noted, it is likely that English was known and used by some throughout the chiefly Gaelic parts of Scotland as early as 1698 and that a number of regional and social variations existed in the use of Gaelic and English (C.W.J. Withers 1980, 73-74). Gaelic was everywhere used and widely preferred as the home language, as the

Table 4

Monoglot Gaelic speakers, by parish, in Sutherland and Caithness 1891-1901[1]

	1891			1901		
	No. of Gaelic only speakers	Gaelic monoglots as a percentage of (a) total Gaelic pop.	Gaelic monoglots as a percentage of (b) total parish pop.	No. of Gaelic only speakers	Gaelic monoglots as a percentage of (a) total Gaelic pop.	Gaelic monoglots as a percentage of (b) total parish pop.
(a) Sutherland						
Assynt	499	22.5	19.5	166	8.3	7.0
Clyne	40	3.3	2.3	13	1.0	0.8
Creich	39	3.0	1.9	32	2.8	1.7
Dornoch	102	6.0	4.2	62	3.9	2.2
Durness	40	5.0	4.1	20	3.0	2.3
Eddrachilis	81	6.7	5.7	45	3.9	3.2
Farr	117	7.3	6.3	46	2.2	1.8
Golspie	6	0.8	0.4	21	2.9	1.3
Kildonan	11	1.2	0.6	4	0.5	0.2
Lairg	21	2.6	1.8	3	0.4	0.3
Loth	1	0.4	0.2	1	0.5	0.2
Rogart	23	2.5	1.9	15	1.8	1.3
Tongue	114	6.9	5.9	41	2.3	2.3
	1,115			469		
(b) Caithness						
Bower	-	-	-	-	-	-
Canisbay	1	5.0	0.1	1	5.5	0.1
Dunnet	-	-	-	-	-	-
Halkirk	3	0.6	0.1	4	1.0	0.1
Latheron	61	3.0	1.0	11	0.8	0.2
Olrig	1	1.7	0.1	-	-	-
Reay	27	3.4	1.3	-	-	-
Thurso	1	0.2	0.1	2	0.5	0.1
Watten	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wick	3	0.8	0.1	2	0.4	0.1
	97			20		

1 : Census of Scotland 1892, 8-11; 1902. 8-12.

language of everyday communication and as the medium of religious provision. English, where it was used at all, was employed in business transactions, especially in those parts of the Highlands bordering on and trading with the Lowlands. This varying use of Gaelic or English in different social domains was accompanied by sex-based and age-based differences in language usage. On the whole, males appear to have been far better acquainted with English than females - as a result of trading contacts, greater general mobility, and predominance in schools whose chief concern was anglicisation. As one eighteenth century commentator observed 'The great difference between the Children of the two Sexes, is very remarkable; but the same is the Case over all the Highlands. Wherever there is access to a School, the Boys are carefully put to it; but the Parents consider Learning of any kind as of Little Moment to the Girls, on which Account, great Numbers of them never go to School' (W. Mackay ed., 1980, 126). Moreover, in those areas where the language was weakening, Gaelic seems to have lingered longer and to have been used more correctly amongst the older age groups. In Halkirk in 1834 and Dunnet in 1840 for example, Gaelic was commonly used only by the elderly while the children all spoke English 'which, it is acknowledged, prevails now more than it did thirty or forty years ago'. Many of these trends in the way both Gaelic and/or English were used - by generation, by sex, by region, by social domain, and in the 'purity' of the language employed - underlay the shift from Gaelic to English in northern Scotland.

Perhaps the single greatest mechanism of language change was the school. The chief concern of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) begun in Edinburgh in 1709 and until 1811 almost the only educational system in the Gaelic areas of Scotland, was to extend English speaking through schooling

(J.I. Campbell 1950). By 1755 SSPCK schools operated in the Sutherland parishes of Durness, Assynt, Creich, Lairg, Clyne, Kildonan, and Tongue and in the Caithness parishes of Reay, Thurso, Latheron, Wick, and Canisbay. Although by the 1790s the parent organisation was tending to concentrate its rather scarce resources in other parts of the Highlands, SSPCK schools were located in Eddrachilis, Durness, Tongue, Creich, Reay, Latheron, Canisbay, Halkirk and Wick at that period. Males predominated over females in all these schools. The decline of Gaelic in Clyne, considered marked by 1840, was reckoned to be the result of temporary migration to the south and 'the increase of education', and in Dornoch by 1834 Gaelic had 'lost ground considerably during the last twenty-five years, owing to the influx into the parish, from various parts of the kingdom, of persons who speak the English language, but especially the introduction of schools'. In Golspie, Gaelic was likewise 'fast on the decline' by 1834 chiefly 'from better education'.

In 1811 the Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools began their operations in the Highlands. Their main concern was to promote the reading of the Scriptures in Gaelic and for a while their endeavours were greeted with affection. Over a period of time, however, and in combination with a widespread lack of Gaelic language texts, the effect was to promote a desire for literacy and learning which could only be fulfilled through English. As one author noted in 1840 'It is remarkable that the Gaelic School Society will probably prove the means at a remote period, of the expulsion of the Gaelic language from the Highlands. The teachers employed by that useful society, to whom we owe much taught the young to read the Scriptures in their native tongue. This implanted a desire to acquire knowledge on other subjects, which induced them to have recourse to the English language as the medium of communication' (*N.A.S.* 15, 112). In several parishes, parochial schools were also in

existence and like the SSPCK schools used English as the medium of instruction. Although in Assynt, Gaelic was taught in the parochial school from 1760 to 1803, English was used thereafter as was also the case in Creich, Farr, Lairg, Rogart, and Tongue parishes where parochial schools were settled by 1826 (P.P. 1826, XVIII, 947-960). From 1872 education in English in all schools was compulsory and Gaelic received little or no attention in this sphere until the second decade of the twentieth century (J. Campbell 1950).

The move towards anglicisation through the school was facilitated through a number of demographic changes and through population mobility on a variety of scales. The trend of population in Sutherland and Caithness from 1755 to 1901 may be seen from Table 5. Both counties exhibit a similar population background : of growth until the mid-nineteenth century and a later period of decline to 1901 with certain parishes experiencing a marked drop and others, especially those with a large proportion in towns or villages, dominating the change of population in the area. These population totals give no insight, however, into a number of demographic and social changes in the north of Scotland during this period : changes of importance in understanding the shifting balance of languages in the area.

The movement of people in Sutherland and Caithness took place at a range of scales. Permanent emigration overseas, chiefly to Canada and the United States of America, was an important feature of Highland demography from the mid-1700s onwards and Sutherland and Caithness were no exception. During the eighteenth century, reasons for such migration was often famine or at least a continued relative scarcity due most usually to a persistent pressure upon too few resources by a growing population with only a limited economic base and few opportunities. Although simple Malthusian answers should not be invoked too readily, especially during the 1800s when migration was the result of the

Table 5

Population, by parish, in Sutherland and Caithness 1755-1901

		1755[1]	1801[2]	1841	1881	1901
(a)	Sutherland					
	Assynt	1934	2395	3173	2781	2386
	Clyne	1406	1643	1765	1812	1724
	Creich	1705	1974	2582	2223	1836
	Dornoch	2780	2362	2714	2523	2794
	Durness	1000	1208	1109	780	870
	Eddrachilis	869	1253	1699	1525	1418
	Farr	2800	2408	2217	1930	2557
	Golspie	1790	1616	1214	1356	1665
	Kildonan	1433	1440	256	1942	1772
	Lairg	1010	1209	913	1355	1081
	Loth	1193	1374	2526	584	449
	Rogart	1761	2022	1501	1227	1105
	Tongue	1093	1348	2041	1929	1783
		20,774	17,883	23,415	21,967	21,440
(b)	Caithness					
	Bower	1287	1572	1689	1608	1453
	Canisbay	1481	1936	2306	2626	2192
	Dunnet	1235	1366	1380	1607	1232
	Halkirk	3075	2545	2963	2705	2385
	Latheron	3675	3612	7637	6675	5223
	Olrig	875	1127	1584	2002	1555
	Reay	2262	1406	1067	994	974
	Thurso	2963	3628	4381	6217	5406
	Watten	1424	1246	1266	1406	1230
	Wick	3938	3986	10,393	12,822	12,250
		22,215	22,474	35,866	38,662	33,900

1 : From J. Webster (1755) in J.G. Kyd (1952).

2 : Census of Scotland. The totals for the other dates are likewise from the Census.

deliberate expulsion of people, the disastrous effects of bad harvests, crop failure or crop disease were potent forces behind the decision to migrate. For three years from 1782, the north of Scotland suffered greatly from famine due to continuous bad weather and blighted crops: 'The condition of all the north part of Scotland is truly lamentable. In Sutherland and Ross shires many people have already perished for want of food' (P.P. 1846, XXXVII, 502). Sutherland and Caithness were perhaps the last areas of Scotland to be affected by the processes of agricultural and social 'improvement' (J. Sinclair 1795). From the early 1800s, many forced clearances of population added to the out-movement of people who quitted their harsh native environment for a new life elsewhere. Many, of course, were not lost to Scotland and travelled only to the Ross-shire coast or to the Lowland cities, but many more journeyed overseas leaving the large rural parishes almost empty of people. Sutherland had a net out-migration rate of 8.3 per cent in 1851 (2329 persons) and a net out-migration rate of 16.9 per cent (4296 persons) in 1901 whilst Caithness lost 3003 persons (7.3 per cent) in 1851 and 11,537 persons (25.7 per cent) in 1901 (R. Osborne 1958, 17). The consequence for the Gaelic language in the north was of a major weakening of the core population of native speakers (E. Richards 1973, 70-71).

Internal migration particularly to the coasts there to live in densely settled townships was a common feature in both counties during the 1800s. Such redistribution reinforced Gaelic in the coastal villages and towns and in certain occupational groupings such as fishing where Gaelic persisted as the language of that trade long after its substitution by English and the employment of English by such persons in other domains of use (N. Dorian 1973). The way that internal migration altered the language patterns in Sutherland and

Caithness is made clear in a report of 1840 upon the coastal parish of Latheron. English was more and more in use there by that date and it was reckoned that 'were it not that its progress was considerably impeded by the importation of several colonies of Highlanders from the heights of Kildonan and other parts of Sutherlandshire about twenty years ago, when the sheep system commenced there, its triumphs, ere now, would have been still more extensive' (N.S.A. 15, 93). Gaelic was likewise spoken by incomers to Wick parish which was otherwise entirely Lowland Scottish in language by the mid-nineteenth century.

Periodic migration to find temporary employment in agriculture or for the women, as domestic servants, was an important part of the economy of the north of Scotland and an important agent of linguistic change. Many persons from Farr and Loth and several other Sutherland parishes went annually to the south of Scotland in the 1770s and earlier, and reports of 1793 and 1794 upon Reay and Wick parishes describe the movement of 'poor people' and 'reduced families' to the cotton mills in Lanarkshire. Many returned to their native north after securing sufficient cash to ward off privation resulting from failed harvests. During the 1800s this temporary migration often took the form of a regular movement by Sutherland natives to the east coast fishing grounds (M. Gray 1957) and was often undertaken by older males as well as the young of both sexes (T. Devine 1979). The shift from Gaelic to English within the north was thus made easier through a familiarity with the latter language by those persons who had contact with the areas of English speaking to the east and south. Immigration of English speakers, many settling as a consequence of the changing agricultural base, also undermined the status of Gaelic : 'Amongst the persons speaking only English (in Sutherland) are many sheep farmers and their shepherds, who immigrated from the south' (E.G. Ravenstein 1879, 593).

In conclusion, although the shift from Gaelic to English was not everywhere equally felt, it is likely that it followed a number of stages. The wholesale replacement of Gaelic by English within any given district or by one individual would appear to have been evident at an early stage by the increased use of English words or idiom within the Gaelic and an associated decline in 'purity' of the Gaelic used (A. Gunn and J. Mackay eds. 1897, 172-183). Even in isolated Durness by 1834, the Gaelic there was 'a good deal corrupted by the younger people who now speak English'. Moreover, as the example of Durness suggests, the use of English in place of Gaelic was more common amongst the young whilst the older generations used Gaelic more commonly and with a greater degree of correctness. In Assynt by 1840, the young were said to be 'ambitious of acquiring English' and reports upon Dornoch, Eddrachilis, Farr, Golspie, Lairg, Loth, Rogart, and Tongue parishes for the mid-1800s all testify to this generation difference in language use and thus sugrest an age-based shift from Gaelic towards English.

The upper classes within Sutherland and Caithness seem to have forsaken Gaelic for English long before the general mass of the population. The social status attached to an ability to speak English was often crucial in the decision to speak English more often than Gaelic and in certain cases, Gaelic speakers would deny an ability in that language in the light of its associations with incivility (N. Dorian 1978). Together with its use in schools, the adoption of English was more apparent in its replacement of Gaelic as an everyday language than in other social domains. Gaelic was long preferred and used as the home language and particularly as the language of religious ordinance even in those areas where English was increasingly used in most other social situations. As was noted for Durness in 1834 'Though a considerable proportion of the young can speak English, yet very few are able to follow out or understand an English sermon.

Indeed, even those who understand and speak the English well, always prefer the Gaelic services' (N.S.A. 15, 96). The above processes of language usage and language preference and the below statement upon Tongue parish exemplify the shifting linguistic situation in the north of Scotland : 'The language of the peasantry is Gaelic; in it they invariably converse with one another, but, owing to the influx of persons from the south, the influence of schools, and the frequency with which they go south in quest of labour, English is generally understood by the young, and spoken by many of them with considerable accuracy (N.S.A. 15, 177).

In a number of studies upon the later position of Gaelic in Sutherland, the idea of the 'laggard semi-speaker' - one who employs English words within a largely Gaelic idiom or who uses Gaelic for certain social situations and English for others - has been advanced in understanding the shift from 'Gaelic' to 'English' areas (N. Dorian 1977; 1978; 1981). It is likely that this complex usage of language was apparent in Sutherland and Caithness for some period and that the position of the language boundaries in the past (Figure 2) must be seen as representing the divide between those areas in which one language was more generally used than the other although both languages were employed in different social situations within the 'Gaelic' and 'English' areas. The decline of Gaelic may have apparent in terms of the geographical retreat of this language border, but it was determined by its widespread substitution by English as the day-to-day language, as the language of business and schooling, and by the adoption of English by the young. The retention of Gaelic as the language of religious administration and its use by the elderly was not sufficient to secure the widespread employment of the language in view also of population loss and the decline of the monoglot population.

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE GAELIC LANGUAGE IN SCOTLAND:

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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